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ABSTRACT

This document summarizes the proceedings of a 2-day conference on training in small and medium businesses in the European Economic Community. Some of the topics discussed by the speakers include distance learning and the importance of training for owners and managers of small and medium enterprises. A series of guides that have been prepared to help organizations improve training was also introduced. The five guides include (1) a general guide to the development of trainer competency for the creation of effective small business training programs; (2) a guide to the basic competency requirements for developing training programs to stimulate pre-start-ups; (3) a guide to the basic competency requirements for developing effective training programs to assist small business start-ups; (4) a guide to the competency requirements for developing training programs for businesses under 50 employees; and (5) a guide for trainers to help small firms cope with the creation of the European Market in 1992. A topic of workshops at the conference was the small business trainers and training organizers who need to improve their competencies and the main obstacles encountered when trying to do so. Ways that the guides could be used to improve training competencies were examined. Finally, amendments to make the guides more accessible were suggested. (KC)

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# THE "EUROPEAN SEMINAR ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMPETENCIES OF TRAINERS AND ORGANIZERS OF TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR SMES" WAS HELD IN CEDEFOP (BERLIN) FROM 7 TO 8 JUNE 1989

50 experts from the 12 Member States of the European Community and from various Community institutions met for two days of joint reflection. The participants, who are closely acquainted with the problems of SMEs in their own countries, had the opportunity of getting to know more about these problems in the other countries of the Community.

Two representatives of the Commission participated actively in the Seminar and informed the participants that the Commission of the European Communities was very much aware of the problems of training in small and medium enterprises; they were Mrs. Gaudin, in charge of training for small and medium enterprises in DG 23, and Mrs. Danau, who represented the Eurotecnet programme of the Commission's Working Party on Human Resources. Mr. A. Louzine from the International Labour Organization in Turin also participated.

The opening addresses were given by E. Piehl, Director of CEDEFOP, E. MULLER, representative of the Management Board, A. Melis, Project Coordinator, C. Politi, Deputy Director of CEDEFOP, and the two representatives of the Commission, J. Gaudin and D. Danau.

Various aspects of the subject were highlighted in these opening addresses.

With regard to CEDEFOP, E. Piehl and C. Politi mentioned the role of the Centre as a meeting place for experts, entrepreneurs and trade unions from the Member States of the EC where they can exchange experience and promote new initiatives. Referring specifically to training in small and medium enterprises, they pointed out that there are various projects which tackle this subject from different

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angles and that they all give us a broader view of the whole: these include studies on the provision of distance learning in the various countries of the Community for owners and managers of SMEs, studies on the databases in the EC and the circulation of information on training and other facilities for SMEs. These projects also cover small business in terms of its role in regional development, and include studies on the in-firm training of youth and work on the training of trainers.

Referring to the Guides, E. Muller stressed that it was the Commission's interest in small and medium enterprises which had had an influence on the birth of this project.

Firstly there was the EC Action Programme for small and medium enterprises (Council Resolution of 3 November 1989), and the recognition that SMEs constitute a great potential for the future growth of employment.

Secondly, there were the recommendations of the Economic and Social Committee which stressed the importance of training for owners and managers of small and medium enterprises as a fundamental element of life in the SMEs which had to be especially developed, and finally there were the studies envisaged by CEDEFOP on the training needs of owner-managers of small and medium enterprises, all of which led the Centre in 1987 to embark on a series of concrete studies which could serve to effectively stimulate a training policy specifically adapted to the needs of the small and medium enterprise.

A. Melis, the Project Coordinator, stated that the objectives pursued while drafting these Guides were quite clear:

- Place primary emphasis on the training of owners and managers of SMEs, more specifically, small business owners, in particular before the introduction of the Single European Market.

- Promote and stimulate action along these lines in the countries of the EC, both at national level and at transnational or European level.

- Promote and stimulate reflection on the specific competencies required to train owners and managers of SMEs, taking the different types of training for the management of small enterprises as the benchmark or point of reference.

- Stimulate existing networks and enlarge them so that their objectives include mutual information and



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international cooperation, thus promoting circulation of information and the implementation of joint action.

CEDEFOP believes that one of its important tasks is to give the Commission the technical aid it needs to launch programmes addressed to SMEs in the specific field of training.

In this connection CEDEFOP has welcomed with great interest the "Experimental Training Schemes to prepare SMEs for 1992" published by DG 23 in January this year and has whole-heartedly accepted the proposal to include the Guides in the material prepared to aid the organizations and institutions which have the task of developing programmes for the SMEs.

D. Danau gave an interesting presentation of Eurotecnet and offered constructive criticism and comments on the SME Guides.

Eurotecnet was presented to the participants as a Community action programme in the field of vocational training and the new information technologies which are of special interest to small and medium enterprises. Indeed, many of its 135 innovative training projects which form a true European network, are carried out in small businesses.

J. Gaudin gave an exhaustive presentation of the problems facing small and medium enterprises in the Community, and the policies which have been developed in this context, in particular by DG 23 (previously SME Task Force).

Among other things, she stressed the importance attached by the Commission to the improvement of the environment of the SMEs, the action taken to encourage internal modernization, particularly the financial aids, the importance of helping SMEs to learn to undertake action for transnational cooperation, and the means placed at their disposal (BC-NET, Euro-partnerships, etc.).

Finally, she underlined the importance of information (Euroguichets) and training for small business owners and described the main objectives of the "Pilot Schemes to Prepare SMEs for 1992". This programme has two objectives: 1) to train SME owners and managers in strategic management in view of 1992 and, 2) to mobilize sectoral and territorial structures to provide more information and increase the awareness of SME managers with regard to the 1992 perspective.

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In order to achieve these objectives specific action has been proposed, such as the "organization of a network of training projects and cooperation between training institutes", the training of SME managers in cooperation strategies, "the stimulation of the role of the large companies and banks with respect to the training of SME managers" and evaluation and follow-up of all action taken.

The aim of the Seminar

The purpose of the Seminar was to enable CEDEFOP, together with the group of invited experts, to think about the proposal made by the Centre to improve the level of training given to SME owners and managers. This proposal took the form of several "Guides to competency in the design of effective training programmes for small businesses in the European Community".

There were several reasons for launching this project:

Firstly, the great importance attached to small and medium enterprises within the Community, both in terms of numbers, and in terms of their economic contribution, their extensive participation in the total production of exports, their extensive participation in the formation of the Gross National Product in the various countries, and their recognized ability to create new jobs.

Secondly, the involvement of SME owners and managers in the management and development of their businesses, which means there is a very close relationship between the characteristics of their management and the progress of the enterprise. The positive aspects of the management exercised by the small business owner, his quick decisions, his flexibility in adapting to constantly changing market situations, and his willingness to work in fields of production or services which cannot be supplied by large companies, all constitute important reasons for his viability.

However, the problems of management of his small business, of knowledge and utilization of the environment, and the identification and formulation of his training needs, led CEDEFOP to address itself to a key target group: the organizations which deal with the counselling, advice and training of small and medium business owners, and specifically the trainers and counsellors.

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## Presentation of the Guides

Allan Gibb, Director of the Durham University Business School, described the Guides and presented their underlying philosophy.

This tool, both as a "European Guide" stressing the conviction that there are many good examples of effective training for SMEs in Europe, and as our task, has the fundamental purpose of disclosing these programmes, i.e. identifying, analysing and disseminating them.

This is the spirit in which the Guides are offered: they do not "discover" a number of key competencies required by the SME trainer, but "systematize" in the form of competencies all the elements which the effective SME training programmes have in common.

There are five separate Guides:

1) A general Guide to the development of trainer/ organizer competency for the creation of effective small business training programmes.

2) A guide to the basic competency requirements for developing training programmes to stimulate the pre-start-ups.

3) A Guide to the basic competency requirements for developing effective training programmes to assist business start-ups.

4) A Guide to the competency requirements for developing effective training programmes to assist small businesses under 50 employees to survive and grow.

5) A Guide to the challenge to trainers and organizers of 1992 and the competencies required to develop effective programmes to help small firms cope with the transition.

In each Guide there are examples and cases of training programmes in countries of the Community and there is also an additional bibliographical Guide which contains a short list of books, pamphlets and other guides available in each country.

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Why are the Guides needed?

The Guides have been developed because:

- Due to the nature of his/her occupation, the small independent business person needs a distinctive approach which is different from that offered to managers in large companies.

- This approach requires in turn the development of very distinctive competencies among trainers and organizers.

- Unless this challenge is met, the supply of training will continue to remain well below the needs.

- Needs should be clearly distinguished from demands. For a variety of reasons there may well be substantial training needs in this sector which are not brought forward into a clear demand from the supply side.

- The conversion of needs into effective demands is the major challenge to which these Guides are directed.

Training as an "entrepreneurial" business

From this angle, providers of training for SMEs need to take a business-like approach. The competencies of trainers and organizers are closely linked to a process of business development as can be seen in the following Exhibit.

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TRAINING AS A BUSINESS

| |
|---|
| Identifying and segmenting potential customers |
| Identifying the needs of customers |
| Understanding the existing environment and the way it already meets customers learning needs through counselling, advice and information |
| Being aware in particular of what training programmes already exist and their strengths and weaknesses |
| Identifying the gaps and therefore the objectives for new programme development |
| Developing the appropriate programme |
| Achieving the necessary quality standards in delivery of the programme |
| Marketing the programme |
| Ensuring efficiency and effectiveness through monitoring and control of the delivery process |
| Evaluating customer satisfaction |

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The business-like approach to training must also, however, be entrepreneurial in delivery and marketing and not bureaucratic. It is possible to have a business-like approach to training but with a delivery that is unenterprising. Such fashionable management theorists as Drucker and Peters point to the characteristics of the entrepreneurial approach as being: flexibility in changing the approach to match changing circumstance; informality which facilitates flexibility; mistake making as a means of learning; personal customer focus as opposed to broader formal marketing approaches; holistic approaches to management, rather than functional approaches; overlapping jobs and "untidiness"; wide freedom for initiative; sacrificing of control to achieve this initiative providing greater ownership of the business to the individual who is running it as a means of developing commitment; and the close linking of rewards with company performance. These managerial philosophies can be embodied in training approaches.

These elements, presented in the statement made by A. Gibb (Director of the Small Business Centre of Durham University) prepared the way for discussion in the workshops.

Workshops

The workshops discussed the small business trainers and training organizers who need to improve their competencies and mentioned the main obstacles encountered when trying to do so. They went on to examine how the Guide could be used as a point of departure to improve training competencies. Finally, they suggested amendments to be made to the Guides in order to make them more accessible. The rapporteurs of each group presented the results in the plenary.

The following are some of the critical contributions made by the workshops:

- Annexes 1 and 2 of the Guides which present various SME training programmes in the EC and in which some of the programmes are described in detail, provide valuable information which, if it is to remain valid, must be updated periodically,

- the Guides are a motivating and useful tool serving several objectives: a selection tool for SME trainers/ advisors, a point of departure for designing training programmes, a checklist of competencies which will enable self-appraisal and self-diagnosis. But if their motivating capacity is to become more effective, it

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will be necessary to develop concrete programmes based on them.

In the following we will present some of the specific contributions made by the four workshops.

Working group 1: "Training for pre-start-ups"
Chairman: E. Muller  Rapporteur: L. Santiago de Pablo

The trainers or training organizers in contact with the pre-business start-up group fall into two disparate categories:

a) a small percentage of representatives of business organizations and b) a much larger number of officials from the Administration belonging to the different bodies of teaching staff. This numerical predominance of the officials is due to the fact that the "pre-start-ups" come from the following sectors:

- students of all levels and specialities: basic, vocational, university education...
- apprentices,
- unemployed persons,
- workers from firms and sectors undergoing change
- emigrants who return without employment,
- persons from commercial offices with a work contract system.

The obstacles which hamper an adequate professional commitment of the training coordinators and/or trainers include:

. to a large degree, the attitude of the public officials for these trainers,

. the fact that the spirit of private enterprise, of risk-taking and initiative has generally been missing in student class-rooms,

. the social environment which for long periods has been against private enterprise, viewing it as a symbol of egoism and exploitation,

. the accumulated burdens and strictures set up by the public administrations for those wishing to create and maintain small enterprises.

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How CEDEFOP's Guide can be used to good effect:

Basically one should start with the existing networks of informal contacts set up by the different bodies of the Member States which all have the common desire of providing training to owners and managers of small businesses.

At the same time an attempt should be made to exploit all types of similar activities undertaken by various Community institutions, especially DG 23 and the Task Force for Human Resources.

Working group 2: "Training for start-ups"
Chairman: P. Fiorentino Rapporteur: J. Doublet

This group specifically referred to two obstacles which hamper the development of trainer competencies: firstly, funding, in the sense that the training of competent trainers is an investment which does not produce immediate results and often requires external financial support; secondly, the cultural obstacle which makes small business owners pay little attention to training and not consider it as anything more than an exceptional means of solving a specific problem.

Let us also take a closer look at the discussion on the person of the SME trainer. Most of the participants agreed that the Guide had broken with the image of the trainer as a captive of teaching, that he was not a professional trainer, but was generally an advisor or counsellor well versed in the subject, and that this "counsellor" primarily required two things: information and the competencies to pass it on.

Another problem which arose in the course of this debate was that of identifying and defining the different groups of experts participating in this training, for example, the consultant, the advisor and the trainer; it was agreed that they have different tasks vis-à-vis the entrepreneur, even though these tasks are not clearly delineated.

Working group 3: "Training for existing business"
Chairman: J. Allesch Rapporteur: Ch. Park

The discussion in this group mainly centred on the characteristics of the small business and the competencies of the trainer who wishes to establish a fruitful contact with the small entrepreneurs.

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In this context three aspects were considered to be necessary for this trainer: a) didactic competencies or the ability to communicate; b) specialized knowledge of the subject and c) organizational competencies. One objective difficulty which arises here is the possibility of finding one single person who possesses all the necessary competencies mentioned in the Guide; it was felt that the ideal situation would only be encountered in a team of different trainers plus institutional support.

The importance of localizing good databases which could provide all the necessary information was also stressed.

It was felt that the trainer should be viewed more as the agent facilitating training and/or the manager of the training process, because there was general agreement that the small entrepreneur has many diverse sources of learning how to manage his business, for instance, learning from other owners or managers, copying practices which have proved to be successful in other businesses, learning through trial and error, through his own methods of application, through discussion and pedagogical techniques such as role planing or the discovery method.

All this implies that the trainer assumes a role which is fundamentally that of a person facilitating learning in addition to that of disseminating learning content. It was found that the trainer in particular needs to posses entrepreneurial competencies and must be able to "sell" training, i.e. master certain techniques which will enable him to put across the message of the benefits of training to small businesses. As the small business owner is very reluctant to spend his time in training courses, the trainer must have credibility and be able to create the belief that the time spent in training is worth the effort.

Finally, emphasis was placed on the importance of evaluation which should take place at three levels: 1) the level of the client, i.e. the small business; 2) the level of the institution or the training organization, and 3) the level of the trainer. It was stressed that the information resulting from evaluation should be used to modify, adapt and re-design the training programmes, where necessary.

Working group 4: "Training for 1992"
Chairman: R. Holzer  Rapporteur: V. Benson

The proximity of the creation of the European Market reveals the urgent necessity of training the small



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business owner for the new opportunities and new risks which he/she will have to face within a very short time.

The role of the trainer thus becomes especially important, and it is becoming increasingly evident that a high degree of credibility vis-à-vis the small entrepreneur is required if training is to be effective. It is highly probable that small business owners are carrying out or intend to carry out their own research and surveys which will prepare them for 1992. It is even possible that, in certain cases and especially with regard to technical questions, the small business owner may be better informed about the impact of the European Market than the trainer.

Unfortunately, the majority of the small enterprises do not have the necessary resources to undertake detailed surveys of the Single Market in the same way as the large companies. Therefore, the trainer will play a key role in everything related to:

- informing the business owner about the changes and consequences of the measures taken in 1992,
- persuading the business owner to study the strengths and weaknesses of his enterprise in the light of these changes,
- counselling him so that he can draw up an effective strategy,
- giving him training in the necessary sectors.

The workshop acknowledged that the design and focus of Guide 5 would be a very useful tool for the trainer confronted with this problem. However, it stressed the fact that there would be substantial variations in the effects of 1992 even within a single country, and that, as a consequence, training had to be differentiated at regional or even at sectoral level.

Discussions in national groups. Rapporteur: A. Gibb

In another session the Seminar participants formed national groups in order to discuss three topics:

- Was it necessary in their countries to develop programmes and activities to improve the competency of SME trainers?

- What are the key areas and the priorities?

- Was it necessary and feasible to undertake international programmes to tackle these subjects?

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The participants unanimously acknowledged the necessity in their own countries, stated that international cooperation was necessary, and indicated priorities and key areas. Many comments were made and they are summarized briefly in the following:

a) The necessity of improving the competency of the trainer

- All the countries agreed on the importance of these activities stating that it was necessary to make a distinction between programmes for trainers and programmes for organizers.

- There are tremendous variations in training provision in the different countries and the quality also varies.

- It was said that many trainers, in their beliefs and attitudes, do not feel the need to train themselves. Strangely enough, this is an attitude very similar to that of the owner-managers of small businesses.

- The training supply offer for trainers and organizers should be segmented as the training needs vary greatly depending on the final group of users. For instance, training to increase business start-ups requires clear coordination with educational institutions, vocational training centres and perhaps even universities. The training of trainers for existing business is directed towards a clearly distinctive target group.

- In other countries there is a need to develop specific capacities more for one industrial sector than for another (e.g. crafts activities in Greece).

- There is also a need to guarantee a permanent training programme for trainers and organizers, and it was felt that the most expedient way would be to define "aptitude levels" as the selection of good trainers would be greatly facilitated if there were some sort of "aptitude certificates".

b) Priorities and key areas

Among others the following observations were made: It is no doubt necessary to have generalists who can cover all the areas. However, specific needs have also been identified, e.g. action to support innovative enterprises.

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Training for 1992 and the training of trainers for 1992 will, in some cases, have to be specific for each sector. In any case, this training will require special attention in terms of permanent updating.

In some cases, for instance in Luxembourg, there is a need to aid existing businesses so that they can develop their potential to become "international". In general it was felt that it is necessary to link the training of trainers for SMEs to the specific key programmes existing in each country.

c) Possibilities for international cooperation

Everyone agreed that it was very necessary and also feasible to have international cooperation, and the following comments were made:

- In some countries it was felt that there is a need to set up a national committee to deal with the subject of training of trainers.

- An international cooperation programme should start by exploring the possibilities for the exchange of existing programmes.

- There seems to be much scope for the exchange of information in this field. There are more concrete signs of existing affinities which will facilitate exchange between people from Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

- It will be necessary to introduce some amendments and revisions in the Guide before moving on to an international programme for SME trainers.

- One of the most inportant means of transnational cooperation is to be found in the high-quality projects which already exist.

- There seem to be some possibilities for the exchange of trainers, especially in connection with the exchange of programmes.

- The role played by CEDEFOP is a key factor in this process of dissemination and stimulation of projects. Coordination with the activities of DG 23 in this field could be tremendously effective, so could good communication with the European Social Fund.

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Conclusions of the Seminar

C. Politi, Deputy Director of CEDEFOP gave a summary of the work of the two days, also mentioning the activities which CEDEFOP would undertake in this field in future.

First of all he expressed the Centre's satisfaction at the very positive reception given to the Guides by the public for which they were intended, i.e. the officers in the organizations providing support to SMEs, the trainers and the organizers.

Secondly, he suggested a time-table which would make it possible to include the maximum number of the contributions and suggestions made during the two days on the improvement of the Guides and their application. The amendments to be introduced in this first phase did not imply an adaptation of the Guides to specific target groups, sectors or user groups.

Thirdly, there was the necessity to evaluate the Guide in actual use, when it triggered off various activities covering the three fundamental objectives of this project:

- Motivate training schemes for the owners and managers of small and medium enterprises.

- Foster inter-institutional collaboration in the implementation of these schemes, and also stimulate transnational collaboration, making use of and enlarging existing networks.

He was very satisfied to see that the experts participating in the meeting shared his views on the importance of these three objectives; another question to be considered in future was the project of evaluating the progress made within the period of one year.

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